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HUMAN RIGHTS QUESTIONS

Statement submitted by the Four Directions Council, a non-governmental organization in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council, category II

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is circulated in accordance with paragraphs 23 and 24 of Economic and Social Council resoultuion 1296 (XLIV) of 23 May 1968.

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International Year for the World's Indigenous People

1. The General Assembly, in its resolution 45/164 of 18 December 1990, proclaimed 1993 as International Year for the World's Indigenous People, with a view to strengthening international cooperation for the solution of problems faced by indigenous communities in areas such as human rights, the environment, development, education and health.

2. The General Assembly requested the Commission on Human Rights to consider at its forty-seventh session possible United Nations activities in connection with the Year, and requested the Secretary-General to submit to the General Assembly at its forty-sixth session a draft programme of activities based on the recommendations of the Economic and Social Council and of the specialized agencies. The recommendations of the Commission on Human Rights are contained in its resolution 1991/57 of 6 March 1991.

3. As an association of indigenous North American peoples, we have prepared the following suggestions for consideration by the Council.

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* E/1991/30.

Objectives of the Year

4. General Assembly resolution 45/164 focuses on strengthening international cooperation, and Commission on Human Rights resolution 1991/57 recommends that United Nations bodies, regional commissions and specialized agencies consider how their operational activities can most effectively contribute to the solution of problems faced by indigenous people. The principal objective of the International Year should be to improve the quantity and quality of United Nations system assistance to indigenous people.

5. Most United Nations bodies, regional commissions and specialized agencies have competence, resources and expertise related to the aims of the International Year. Most of them already support projects, at least in developing countries, which have a direct impact on indigenous people. The most efficient way to achieve the objectives of the Year is to review, evaluate and, where necessary, modify the management of these existing programmes in order to maximize their contribution to the solution of problems faced by indigenous communities.

6. We suggest that the International Year for the World's Indigenous People be organized as a three-year process:

Review and evaluation of existing operational activities in cooperation with indigenous people themselves (1992);

Implementation of a wide range of demonstration projects, in all parts of the world, to test new approaches (1993);

Cooperative evaluation of demonstration projects, with a view to applying the experience gained to future operational activities (1994).

7. The programme of activities for the International Year to be adopted by the General Assembly at its forty-sixth session need not be a detailed menu of activities, but a framework for integrating indigenous people into this three-year planning, implementation and evaluation process. The Economic and Social Council can best assist the Secretary-General and the General Assembly by suggesting an overall framework for this cooperative process.

The cooperative process

8. As recognized by the Commission on Human Rights in its resolution 1991/57, indigenous people are diverse in their cultures and forms of social organization. To be effective, the programme of activities for the International Year must reflect and respect this diversity, which can best be achieved by involving representatives of indigenous people in all stages and at all levels of the planning, implementation and evaluation process.

9. We recommend that each specialized agency, regional commission and other organization of the United Nations system make a commitment to convene, as early as possible in 1992, a technical conference with representatives of indigenous people, with the aim of:

Identifying existing programme areas or capabilities which are of particular relevance and priority for indigenous people;

Agreeing on specific themes or objectives for special projects to be implemented in 1993 as part of the International Year;

Reviewing existing project guidelines and recommending effective means of including indigenous people in the initiation, design and execution of the special projects to be undertaken in 1993;

Describing appropriate procedures and criteria for the evaluation of projects involving indigenous people, in 1993 and thereafter.

10. We would suggest that Governments also convene technical meetings with indigenous organizations, together with resident representatives of United Nations programmes and agencies, at the national level, and consider modalities for maintaining a participatory approach in the design of their country programmes.

Effective coordination

11. The substantive scope of the International Year is very broad and includes human rights, the environment and all aspects of social and economic development. In our view, the development process is central to achieving the aims of the International Year. It will therefore be essential to coordinate the United Nations bodies and agencies which play the largest and broadest roles in development cooperation. For this reason, we suggest that the Office of the Director-General for Development and International Economic Cooperation be given an explicit coordinating function for the Year.

12. In this regard, we wish to emphasize the relevance of the United Nations Declaration on the Right to Development, and note that General Assembly resolution 45/97 of 14 December 1990, as well as Commission on Human Rights resolution 1990/18 of 23 February 1990, request that activities for the implementation of the Declaration be coordinated by the Office of the Director-General for International Economic Cooperation and the Centre for Human Rights.

13. The Council may also wish to consider linking the International Year for the World's Indigenous People, the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (1992) and the World Conference for Human Rights (1993). We note that the Preparatory Committee for the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development, at its second session (Geneva, 18 March-5 April 1991), adopted a decision recognizing the important contribution that the participation of indigenous people could make to the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development.